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SUBJECT: PRT KIRKUK: WILL GORAN BE A FORCE IN KIRKUK?

REF: BAGHDAD 3205

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Classified By: PRT Kirkuk Governance Section Head Rachna Korhonen for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (U) This is a PRT Kirkuk cable.

¶2. (C) Summary: The Goran ("Change") Movement's top priority in Kirkuk is to capitalize on its strong showing in the July 2009 Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) parliamentary elections to make further inroads against the PUK in Kirkuk in the upcoming national elections. It has focused on the lack of basic services in Kirkuk and implementing Article 140 to resolve Kirkuk's status. Despite significant dissatisfaction among Kirkukis with the PUK's performance as the leading member of the Kirkuk Brotherhood List (KBL) and Kirkuk's Provincial Council (PC), the extent to which Goran will be able to make significant electoral gains in Kirkuk remains unclear. Viewed by many Kirkukis as effete and intellectual, Goran lacks in Kirkuk both recognizable, credible leaders and the kind of grassroots organization that brought it success in Sulaimaniyah province in the July KRG elections. Recent demonstrations in Kurdish neighborhoods of Kirkuk demanding better basic services have underscored Goran's ability to tap Kirkukis' dissatisfaction with ineffectual provincial government incumbents; however, it is not clear that will translate into parliamentary seats in the upcoming national election. End summary.

LACK OF CREDIBLE LEADERS HURTS PARTY'S IMAGE

¶3. (C) Goran is viewed by Kirkukis and Kirkuk politicians as something of an effete, intellectual movement. Many of Goran's members in Kirkuk, the majority of whom are former PUK members, cite disenchantment with the PUK's senior leaders and the party's penchant for corruption and infighting as the reason for their having switched allegiances to Goran. The fight against corruption in the PUK and Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) is a prominent and consistent Goran message. On October 25, after several months of having operated covertly in the city, Goran opened an office in Kirkuk headed by former PUK Peshmerga general Mam Rostam. Despite his bona fides as a Peshmerga fighter Rostam is not held in high regard by some Kirkuki Kurds, who claim he did not adequately support and defend them when Saddam pushed large numbers of Kurds out of Kirkuk in 1991. Goran subsequently opened a media center in Kirkuk on November 9.

¶4. (C) Kirkukis' skepticism about Goran grew when Jalal Johar, another former PUK Peshmerga leader regarded in some quarters as corrupt, was chosen to lead Goran's election preparation effort in Kirkuk. Another blow came at the end of November, when Awad Mohammed Ameen was put forward as Goran's number one candidate in Kirkuk for the upcoming national elections. Ameen, a member of Kirkuk's Provincial Council since 2005 and a former Toilers Party representative, has closely allied himself with Rizgar Ali HamaJan and Raffat

Hussein, both prominent PUK members in Kirkuk. Ameen is seen as a relatively neutral and moderating force in Kirkuk's PC, but also as someone who enjoys influence with Hamajan, Chairman of the PC, raising questions about his true loyalties. Hamajan said Ameen had requested a place on the PUK list, but was turned down. He emphasized that regardless of what list Ameen is on, he supports the KBL and will do what is best for Kurds. (Comment: Hamajan's remarks suggest that there may be truth to anecdotal reports that Ameen is on the PUK's payroll, despite formally being a member of Goran. End comment.) With open list voting, there will be a relatively greater premium on individual candidates, rather than party lists, in the national elections. The fact that Qthan party lists, in the national elections. The fact that the only widely recognizable name on Goran's list in Kirkuk is Awat Mohammed Ameen does not augur well for Goran's prospects.

POPULAR AGENDA

¶ 15. (S) Goran's public agenda in Kirkuk is focused on improving essential services for residents. During a recent meeting, Jalal Johar and Awat Mohammed Ameen described to PRTOFFS how the PUK-led government is unable to govern and provide basic services to Kirkukis. (Comment: An interesting statement since Awat Mohammed Ameen has been an integral part of the government whose performance he now condemns. End comment.) Jalal Johar and Awat Mohammed Ameen articulated a vision for Kirkuk in which all citizens enjoyed access to basic services irrespective of their ethnicity. Johar also asked that the PRT help protect him from the Kurds, especially PUK elements. (Note: He and Ameen said the KDP had offered them support and protection, presumably in return from for a tacit agreement to help further the KDP's political agenda. End note.)

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¶ 16. (C) On December 9 and December 12, residents of the Kurdish neighborhoods of Azadi and Raheemawa demonstrated to demand better essential services. Participants burned tires and blocked roads, but scattered relatively peacefully after Iraqi Police arrived. Local residents told PRTOFFS that Goran media representatives were first on the scene, which some interpreted to mean that they had been present before the events kicked off, and that Goran had orchestrated the demonstrations. The local police chief (who is KDP-affiliated) said in a later conversation with PRTOFFS that Goran had organized the demonstrations. Saleem Karim, a PUK "Malaband" Party leader in Raheemawa, reported a recent spike in the number of people dropping by the PUK's offices to complain about inadequate essential services, suggesting that Goran may be urging residents to decry the PUK's poor performance to further damage the latter's image in the run-up to national elections.

BUT WEAK ORGANIZATION ON THE GROUND

¶ 17. (C) Goran's top priority in Kirkuk appears to be capitalizing on its strong showing in the July 2009 Kurdistan Regional Government parliamentary elections to make further inroads against the PUK in Kirkuk in the upcoming national elections. It has focused on the lack of basic services in Kirkuk and implementing Article 140 to resolve the issue of Kirkuk's status as the issues with which to do that. (Note: See reftel for details on Goran emphasis on implementing Article 140/finalizing Kirkuk's status ahead of other KDP/PUK "national" Kurdish priorities. End note.) Despite significant dissatisfaction among Kirkukis with the PUK's performance as the leading member of the KBL and the PC, it may be difficult for Goran to make significant gains in Kirkuk. Goran has not been established in Kirkuk as long as it had been in Sulaimaniyah province, where it enjoyed considerable success in the July KRG elections. In addition,

there are reports that President Jalal Talabani will run in Kirkuk for a seat in the national Council of Representatives to help revive the PUK's fortunes there. If that were to occur, Talabani's name and connections would likely bolster the PUK and help retard Goran's efforts. (Note: Talabani's Senior Advisor was evasive in a conversation with Deputy PolCouns on whether Talabani might run in Kirkuk. End note.)

¶8. (C) COMMENT: Unlike Sulaimaniyah, where it enjoys stronger organization, more credibility, and a readier platform from which to criticize PUK (and, to a lesser extent, KDP) leadership, Goran remains relatively immature in Kirkuk. In addition to the foregoing factors, its comparatively limited financial resources also constitute a significant disadvantage with respect to the two leading Kurdish parties. The extent to which Goran will succeed in making inroads against the PUK in Kirkuk will depend on its ability to better differentiate itself from the PUK, articulate an agenda beyond opposing the status quo and identify more credible leaders. End comment.

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